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news & notes

January 31, 1992 Volume 2, Number 19

The Rockefeller University

RU to trade in well-worn 570 for 327

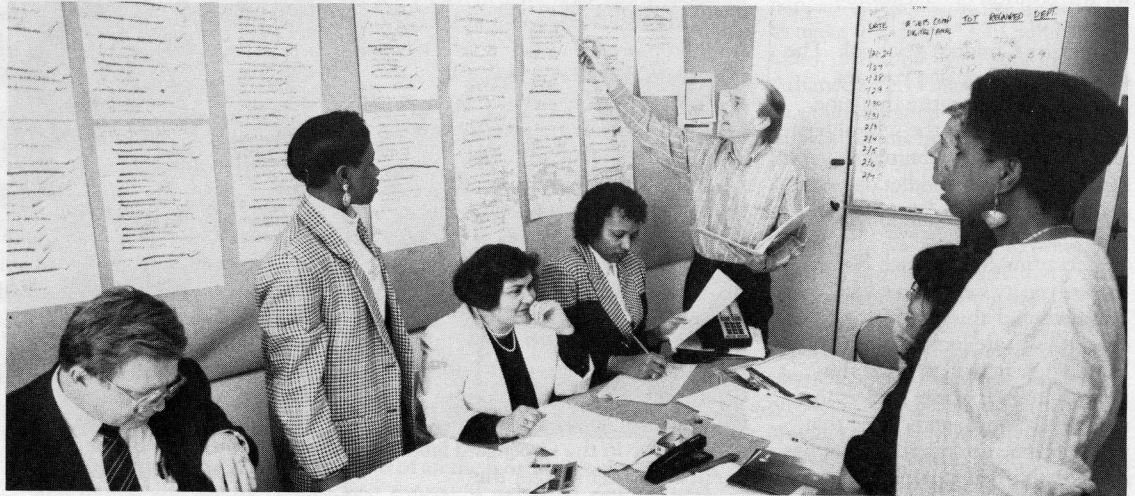
Telephone and fax callers to The Rockefeller University will soon be dialing 327 instead of the well-worn 570 exchange when the university cuts over to its new telecommunications network next April 24.

Portia Goodman, manager of Telecommunications Services, announced the new exchange at last week's regular meeting of the Telecommunications Executive Advisory Committee. "All administrators, lab and service heads, administrative assistants, modem and fax lines will keep their current four-digit extensions unless they request a change," she told *News&Notes*. "The main number of the university will be 327-8000."

Three station-review teams are making appointments with every lab and service to determine specific usage needs. The teams will work into February and will also be responsible for assigning new telephone numbers. Where three or more people are sharing one line, new extension numbers may be required to operate in the new environment.

A Telecommunications staff member at x7757 will answer any questions the university community may have regarding the new exchange.

Goodman also reported that cabling and jacking installation is proceeding on schedule and that the new switch and battery rooms under construction will be complete in time for the switch arrival in March. "We are fortunate to be able to count on the excellent cooperation of the entire university community, particularly our own shop and maintenance people who have given invaluable assistance to the AT&T crews," she added.



Three station-review teams, which are responsible for assigning new telephone numbers, will work into February to determine the telecommunications needs of individual labs and services at the university. Team members include (from left to right): George Lohmuller of AT&T, Kim Holmes of Telecommunications Services, Carmen Rodriguez of AT&T, Carolyn Welch of AT&T, Craig Winton of Telecommunications, Bob Ferrante of AT&T, and Jacqueline Mulero and Ruth Moses of Telecommunications.

Chinese-music concert celebrates Year of the Monkey

By Olivia Gushin

Susan Cheng (or as she is sometimes known, Susan Wong) will see to it that the Year of the Monkey is ushered in properly at Tri-Institutional Noon Recital. The research assistant in the Wilson lab and her colleagues from the group called Music From China will be at Rockefeller University's Caspary Auditorium today (Jan. 31) at noon celebrating the year 4690 with traditional and contemporary Chinese pieces played on the *pipa*, *ruan*, and *yangqin*.

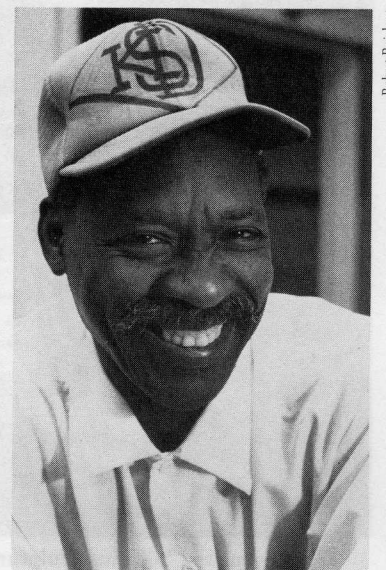
As a child growing up in Hong Kong, and later in New York, Cheng heard traditional Chinese music at home, but always as background noise, something that she was "not particularly interested in." After graduating from Barnard with a major in biology, Cheng found herself with some time on her

hands. By chance she attended a performance of the Canton Opera and became enchanted by the *zheng*, an ancient instrument whose timber resembles a harp. The silk-stringed *zheng* sounded so beautiful to Cheng that she was inspired to launch a second career in music. Cheng studied with the Canton Opera until they left New York to continue their U.S. tour. Afterwards, Cheng started her own amateur Chinese-music group.

Cheng feels strongly that music "is a living form, it has to change and be creative." It was this philosophy, and a belief that Chinese music "is more interesting when performed with a small group," that compelled Cheng to establish her current group, Music From China, eight years after her meeting with the Canton Opera. The instruments used by Music From China are almost the same as

those used thousands of years ago. Cheng plays the *ruan*, a four-string lute with a round body. Other instruments include the *di*, a horizontal flute; two *pipas*, lute-shaped instruments; an *erhu*, a spiked fiddle which has been popular in China since the 13th century; and a *yangqin*, a hammered dulcimer believed to have been introduced in China by Middle Eastern traders. The group's musicians—who include Zhou Long, Wei Laigen, Tang Liangxing, Wu Man, Tien-juo Wang, and Helen Yee—buy their instruments from master craftsmen in China.

See *Concert*, page 4



Why is Oliver Farley of the Rockefeller Paint Shop a good Samaritan? See story, page 2.

2 Children's School director sought

3 Plant-derived drugs hold promise

4 Films reach out to broader audience

Rockefeller receives major gift

The Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Inc. recently pledged \$500,000 to The Rockefeller University. The first installment of \$250,000 was recently received by the Development Office, with the second and final payment scheduled for January 1993.

"I am delighted that Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation chose to make this generous gift to The Rockefeller University,"

said President Torsten Wiesel. "An unrestricted gift of this magnitude is enormously helpful because it can be flexibly applied to meet our most pressing needs and promising opportunities. We are delighted to have the partnership of such an outstanding corporate leader. Gifts such as this one are important for ensuring that our ambitious goals for the university are achieved."

University seeks new Children's School educational director

The university has named a search committee to nominate candidates for the position of educational director of The Rockefeller University Children's School. The new head will replace Barbara Adams, who will retire this June, and will work with the school board and the university administration in developing a new toddler day-care center for the 1993-94 academic year.

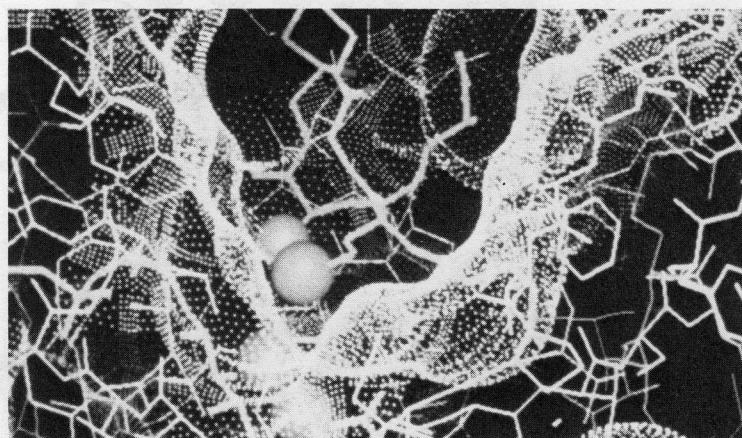
According to Frederick Bohen, the university's executive vice president and chief operating officer, "We are looking for a candidate who will provide the professional expertise, leadership abilities, warmth, and caring that will continue the tradition that has been established at our school for providing a fine quality and loving environment for our children."

The committee has been charged with recommending at least two highly qualified candidates to President Torsten Wiesel, who will then make the final selection. The committee will be headed by Janet Sparrow, who is currently the chairperson of the Board of Directors of The Children's School.

Sparrow is an assistant professor of ophthalmology in the Dyson Vision Institute at the Cornell University Medical College, and an adjunct assistant professor in the Wiesel lab.

Also on the committee are David J. Lyons, the university's vice president for business and finance, and treasurer, who has served for many years as the university president's representative on The Children's School Board of Directors; Heads of Laboratory Stephen K. Burley, Michel C. Nussenzweig, and Michael W. Young; Alice B. Gottlieb, associate professor in the Carter lab; and Odete da Cruz e Silva, a current Children's School Board member and postdoc in the Greengard lab.

An advertisement for the position ran in last Sunday's edition of *The New York Times* education section, and the position will be listed internally in today's *Job Postings*, available in kiosks throughout the university. Virginia Huffman, director of Personnel, will do the staff work for the search committee, screening candidates and notifying relevant professional organizations of the opening.



This cover photo from the latest issue of *SEARCH*, which will soon arrive in home mailboxes, shows the active site of the parasite enzyme trypanothione reductase.

Annual report published in *SEARCH*

Arriving soon in home mailboxes will be the winter 1991 issue of *SEARCH*, *The Rockefeller University Magazine*.

This issue contains the annual report of the university for the academic and fiscal year ending June 30, 1991. Included is an overview of science at Rockefeller written by Susan Blum, Catherine Vanchieri, and Geoffrey Montgom-

ery, as well as a report of the administrative, operational, and financial results for the fiscal year. There are also reports on the Deans' Office and the Development Office, and a letter from the Chairman of the Board, Richard Furlaud.

Laboratories or departments interested in multiple copies of the annual report should contact its editor, Enid Goldberg, x8969.

RU painter restores lost wallet

Oliver Farley of Rockefeller's Paint Shop returned a lost "wallet" to its owner last week.

"I was sitting in the subway near the door," Farley said. "I noticed that people were stepping on a pocket-sized case as they were getting in and out. So I picked it up."

To his surprise, the case contained \$20, a month's passage on the Long Island Railroad—and a check for \$2,095. Farley tracked down its owner, who was not listed

in the Manhattan phone book, by calling the firm whose name was on the check.

"When the man came by Rockefeller to pick up his property, he said 'God bless you—you don't find people like you all the time,'" Farley recounted. "It's true some people would have just taken the \$20 and thrown out the rest; there are a lot of bad people around. But there are a lot of good people, too; there are many good Samaritans in this world."

Letter to the editor:

The Rockefeller University is missing out on a very rich resource, namely, the many volunteers in this city who are eager to donate their time and talents. I was appalled to learn the university has no volunteer-coordinating service, and that potential volunteers must apply to individual labs.

Why not consider accepting volunteer offerings in one central area of Personnel? Volunteers are not trying to take anyone's job away, but are eager and willing to help out in any way they can. Volunteers may even save time and money!

Dorothy A. Meyer
Rockefeller volunteer and
former Administrative Secretary
with The Population Council

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The Rockefeller University is an equal opportunity employer and has an affirmative action program to increase the employment of women and members of protected groups at all job levels.

Corners



Trees frame the Niizuma sculpture in front of Caspary Hall.

Robert Reichert



Symposium explores promise of plant-derived medicines

By Susan Blum

Modern medicine has become a high-tech affair. With its computerized machines such as CAT scanners, and its complicated procedures such as organ transplants, health care seems to be moving ever farther from the natural world. Even the drugs we pick up at the pharmacy seem the very antithesis of nature. Safety-sealed in plastic or foil, encapsulated in time-released pellets, they appear to trumpet technology's triumph over unruly nature.

But the truth is that many drugs commonly used today have their roots—quite literally—in the natural world. Nearly half of all the prescription medications dispensed in the United States contain compounds of natural origin, and over half of these are derived from plants. Many can be lifesaving.

Vincristine and vinblastine are two striking examples. "Superstars" in the chemical war against cancer, these drugs are both derived from *vinca rosea*, commonly known as the rosy periwinkle. People in Cuba, the Philippines, and South Africa have traditionally used this tropical plant to treat eye inflammations, rheumatism, and diabetes. Systematic investigations of the plant in the United States isolated alkaloids—nitrogen-containing compounds—that showed cancer-fighting properties. One periwinkle-derived drug, vincristine, is now the drug of choice in the treatment of childhood leukemia; in combination with another agent, it has increased the rate of remission from the disease from 20 to 90 percent. Another derivative, vinblastine, is an effective treatment for Hodgkin's disease and testicular cancer, while still other periwinkle alkaloids are used to treat breast cancer.

Other plant-derived drugs currently in use include the anti-malarial drug quinine and the heart medicine quinidine (both derived from the bark of cinchona trees), the anti-glaucoma drug pilocarpine (derived from a group of South American trees of the citrus family), and coca shrub derivatives variously used as anesthetics and to treat heart attack victims.

Nature's unity is key

Natural products' medicinal benefits derive from nature's underlying unity. All plants and animals must metabolize energy sources to meet their own energy needs. All must defend themselves against invasion by organisms both

Sarah A. Laird



Tropical rain forests harbor one half of all the world's species of flora and fauna, and are by far the best source of potential new natural drugs. Yet rain forests are fast disappearing.

large (predators) and small (microorganisms). And all must utilize intracellular communication systems to maintain and coordinate the intricate relationships existing among various specialized cells. Over the course of evolution, from a limited number of chemical building blocks nature has cobbled together countless useful compounds to meet these various needs. With curiosity, experimentation, and luck, mankind has learned how to harness many of these natural substances for its own benefit.

The promise of plant-derived medicines—and the threat to continued exploration of their potential—was the subject of a symposium held last Friday and Saturday at Caspary Hall. The event was presented by the Rainforest Alliance's Periwinkle Project, in conjunction with the New York Botanical Garden's Institute of Economic Botany.

The event's kickoff speaker, Varro E. Tyler, reported that from prehistoric times to the middle of the twentieth century, plant-derived drugs dominated humanity's pharmacopeia. But then research into natural sources of drugs declined, said Varro, a professor of pharmacognosy (the medicinal use of plants) at Purdue University. This decline is due to a number of factors. For one thing, Varro explained, "the organic chemists who dominate industrial research groups are more oriented toward synthesis"—that is, more interested in creating new compounds than in exploring the potential of natural ones. But, Varro added, "perhaps the most serious obstacle has been the United States Food and Drug Administration," whose drug

approval regulations make developing drugs from natural products a costly and time-consuming affair.

Despite such obstacles, the past few years have seen an upswing of interest in discovering new plant-derived therapeutics, due largely to technological improvements—such as robotics and the techniques of molecular biology—that make it much faster and easier to screen natural compounds for potential beneficial effects. Pharmaceutical companies are embarking on such research, and, in 1988, the National Cancer Institute began an ambitious project to screen extracts of natural products for activity against cancer and the HIV virus.

Rain forests are at risk

But now a new and potentially insurmountable obstacle threatens to stop natural products research for good. Tropical rain forests—dense ecological treasure houses found in the equatorial regions of Asia, Africa, and the Americas—harbor one half of all the world's species of flora and fauna, and are by far the best source of potential new natural drugs. Yet the rain forests are being destroyed at the astonishing rate of 100 acres per minute; an area twice the size of New York is lost every year. Logged for timber and fiber, or burned to make way for cattle pastures and farms, rain forest regions are fast disappearing. And, warned Varro, "the rate of destruction will far outpace efforts to determine the medicinal utility of the species being obliterated."

Last week's conference aimed to gather the wide range of people who must join forces if the rain forest and its cache of potential therapeutic

tics is to be saved. "It's a nice idea to develop drugs from the tropical rain forest, and it's a nice idea to conserve the forest, but that won't happen unless people get together to make it happen," said Sarah Laird, director of the Rainforest Alliance's Periwinkle Project, a program designed to conserve tropical forests by increasing the environmentally sound utilization of medicinal plants.

According to Laird, last week's symposium was the first to bring together the necessary catalytic mix of pharmaceutical company representatives, conservation experts, human rights activists, physicians, academic researchers, physicians, development experts, and more. While sharing their individual expertise, participants learned about practical, ongoing projects that have already been initiated to promote rain forest conservation by encouraging scientific research.

Effort appeals to economics

"The idea is to generate income for conservation initiatives," Laird said. By making conservation of the rain forest at least as economically profitable as its destruction, tropical diversity can be maintained, she said.

Ana Sittenfeld, an official of the Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad (INBio) in Costa Rica, described one such conservation-minded strategy. Merck Sharpe & Dohme, the world's largest drug company, has forged an agreement with INBio, under which Merck pays the institute to "prospect" for potentially useful plants, insects, and microorganisms. Merck scientifically screens the natural products, and, should a profitable drug emerge from the venture, Merck will share the profits with the Costa Rican government. In the meantime, Costa Rica is using the prospecting payments to help conserve the rain forest.

In another arrangement, Shaman Pharmaceuticals, a small California-based drug company, is working with traditional healers, or shamans, who lead them to plants traditionally used by people indigenous to the rain forest. The company has pledged to share any profits from resulting drugs with the shamans' local communities.

"It's important to recognize that conservation is incredibly complicated. There's not just one way to do it," Laird said. But however it's done, it must be done soon, she stressed, before the rain forest and its precious potential vanishes from the face of the earth.

RU's Sunday film series reaches out to broader audience

Some may love it, some may hate it, but the Sunday night Caspary Film Series has become more mainstream.

"We made a conscious effort to appeal to a wider audience this year," said Mark Benedyk, student in the DiNardo lab and co-director of the film program. "In previous years, we brought some very obscure films to campus, like Herzög's *Fear Eats the Soul* and *Where the Green Ants Roam*. Even the people who picked those films weren't terribly interested in coming to the showings.

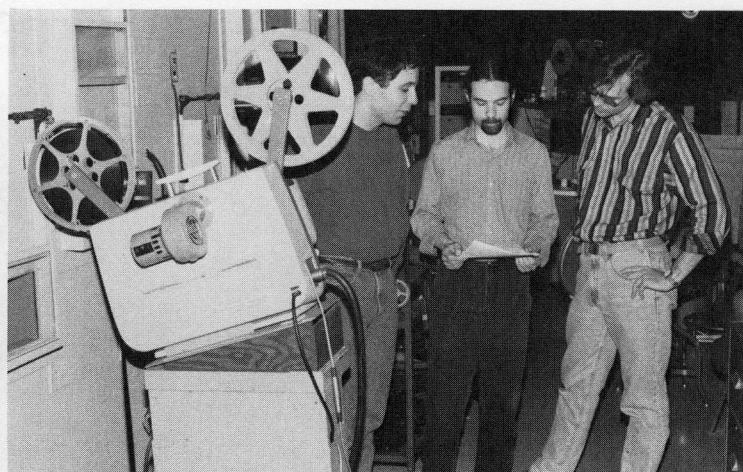
"The films we are featuring this year present a good cross-section," he continued. "We're showing a French New Wave film, a Brazilian *cinema nuovo* movie, and an early Kurosawa production. In addition, we are running *The Big Sleep*, with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, and *Good Morning Vietnam*, with Robin Williams."

The number, as well as the selection, of films has changed this year. David Heath, research associate in the Knight lab and co-director of the program with

Benedyk, explained, "We negotiated some very good price breaks with two of the distributors this year. That enabled us to expand the series significantly—from 15 to 20 films."

Even those who can't always attend the films look forward to their announcement. "The flyers Mark writes are hilarious," commented Adrian Ferre-D'Amare, student in the Burley lab. The subtle humor in the description of an upcoming film explains Ferre-D'Amare's enthusiasm: "A documentary style, highly ironic film about a 16th-century French explorer who tries to integrate himself into the Indian tribe which captures and enslaves him," reads the commentary sent to *News&Notes* written by Benedyk and Heath. "He finally is integrated into the tribe, though not in the conventional sense of the word." The film is entitled *How Tasty was my Little Frenchman*.

Admission to the films is free and open to everyone in the Rockefeller University, and Tri-Institutional, communities. All showings will



Mark Benedyk (left) and David Heath (right), co-directors of the Caspary Film Series, speak with the audio visual technician, James Carozza (center), about upcoming films.

take place at 7:30 P.M., in Caspary Auditorium. The series is sponsored by the Deans' Office.

The schedule for the rest of the academic year follows:

Feb. 2: *Good Morning Vietnam* (1987, director Barry Levinson)

Feb. 9: *Lolita* (1962, director Stanley Kubrick)

Feb. 23: *Personal Services* (1987, director Terry Jones)

Mar. 1: *Persona* (1967, director Ingmar Bergman)

Mar. 15: *The Big Sleep* (1946,

director Howard Hawks)

Mar. 29: *Scandal* (1950, director Akira Kurosawa)

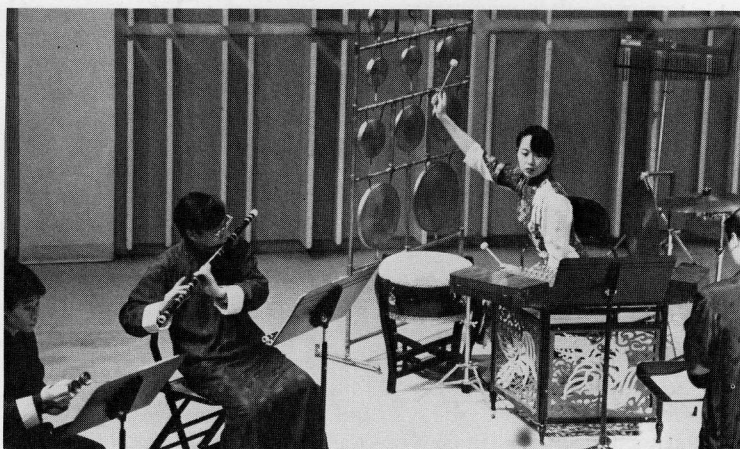
April 5: *Straight, No Chaser* (1989, director Charlotte Zerwin)

April 12: *Seconds* (1966, director John Frankenheimer)

April 26: *How Tasty was my Little Frenchman* (1971, director Nelson Pereira dos Santos)

May 3: *Les Cousins* (1959, director Claude Chabrol)

May 17: *Compulsion* (1959, director Richard Fleischer).



Music From China will usher in the Year of the Monkey—which officially begins Tues., Feb. 4—at a performance today (Jan. 31). Shown here are some of the group's musicians (from left to right) Tien-juo Wang, Wei Laigen, Helen Yee, and Zhou Long.

Concert celebrates Chinese New Year

Continued from page 1

According to Cheng, the best Chinese music is now being performed outside of its motherland. The repression of the Cultural Revolution, followed by China's Open Door in the Nixon years, sent many of the best musicians to the West. "Most of the best musicians," Cheng claims, "are in New York." Cheng calls the group's *pipa* player, Liangxing, "the finest musician from China."

As executive director of Music From China, Cheng is responsible for fund-raising, paperwork, and setting up concert dates. The group plays several small concerts and at

least one in a major venue, such as Merkin Concert Hall, each year.

Music From China not only preserves traditional music, but also commissions works by contemporary composers. Cheng feels that this "creates a new vocabulary and a new way to think of sounds" and "builds on what has been handed down." She finds this endeavor "very challenging, very different, and very rewarding."

Admission to today's recital is free and open to the Tri-Institutional community. The program features calligraphy by Rockefeller's Professor Hidesaburo Hanafusa.

Potpourri

Sunday Film

Good Morning Vietnam (1987, Barry Levinson) will be shown in Caspary Auditorium, Sun., Feb. 2, at 7:30 P.M. Robin Williams plays a rebellious disc jockey sent to Saigon in 1965 to boost troop morale. Admission is free and open to the Tri-Institutional community. (See related story, this page.)

Literature search demonstration

The Library will host a demonstration by BRS Information Technolo-

gies online information retrieval service in Cohn Library Tues., Feb. 11, from 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. A representative of BRS will explain and answer questions on the latest enhancements to the firm's literature search package, which offers access to information in science, medicine, humanities, and business. Reservations for the demonstration are necessary and can be made by calling Patricia Flowers, x8907, or by sending electronic mail to *flowers*.

Flowers also can provide information about computerized literature searching at Rockefeller.

Macintosh Users Group Meeting

RockMUG, Rockefeller University Macintosh Users Group, will hold its next meeting Wed., Feb. 12, 11:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., in Caspary 1B. This meeting will include demonstrations of Farrallon's Timbuktu and Apple's QuickTime. Timbuktu is a software product that allows Macintosh users to share and

control screens and to transfer files across an AppleTalk network. QuickTime is a software utility that allows the incorporation of animation into applications. Everyone is invited to the meeting. Bring your lunch—drinks will be provided. Those who would like to help plan future meetings or who want to be added to the mailing list should contact Rachael Kolb or Anthony Popowicz, x8925, or send electronic mail to *rachael* or *tony*.